

QA 5 – Transmittal of Allergens through Breastmilk

QUESTION:

What are the most common foods (besides peanuts) that are transmitted through breast milk? What foods do Moms have to avoid when breastfeeding a child with food allergies?

For example, an infant is allergic to egg white, but Mom wants to indulge in eggs. How long would it take to pass through the milk so that she could resume breastfeeding?

ANSWER:

Most of the literature indicates that allergens present in breast milk can act as sensitizing agents. One reference suggests that mothers who are breastfeeding infants at risk for food allergies should eliminate cow's milk, egg, and fish for at least the first three months. Another reference suggests the elimination of cow's milk, egg, and peanuts. Although some studies show that elimination of the highly allergenic foods during the entire period of lactation results in a lower cumulative prevalence of atopic dermatitis, there need to be more truly randomized blinded studies to confirm this conclusion.

There are no recommendations to allow the allergenic food in the mom's diet and stop breastfeeding for a period of time to do this. (Generally, it is difficult for a breast-fed infant to stop and start breastfeeding for short periods of time.) Most infants with allergies have impressive atopic dermatitis, and any risk of contamination through the mother's diet is unwise.

Reference:

- 1) Metcalf, Sampson, Simon. Food Allergy: Adverse Reactions to Foods and Food Additives, Blackwell Science, 1997.